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STRUCTURED DEPOSITION AS RITUAL ACTION AT KNOSSOS

by *Eleni Hatzaki*

The building that dominates the Kephala hill, named by Arthur Evans “the Palace,” remains central to any analysis of the material culture of Knossos and Bronze Age Crete.¹ Although the Palace, and Knossos in general, is often taken as a point of reference for discussing Minoan Crete, it is becoming apparent that aspects of the material culture of the largest settlement on the island might have been far more exceptional than previously assumed.² Apart from being the largest, the Palace at Knossos is the longest-lived building of its type, and remained throughout the Middle and Late Bronze Age the focal point of the settlement that it dominated physically and symbolically. Its central court, Minoan halls, pillar rooms, magazines, and even corridors may be viewed as areas of dual essence, incorporating both the everyday and the exceptional. Activities could have included “staged” performances for display, where active or passive participation of the “few” or “many” was crucial.

Sectors of the building that escaped post-Bronze Age robbing for building materials have revealed remarkably well-preserved architecture,³ often accompanied by well-preserved artifactual deposits. Even though the existing data sets derive from fieldwork conducted over a hundred years ago, the building has revealed evidence of human action frozen in time through intentional, or accidental, taphonomic processes.

Consequently, the Palace at Knossos offers a unique opportunity to contextualize assemblages within a built environment. This paper will direct attention underground to assemblages buried below the palace floors

1. The earliest published reference to “the Palace” is in Evans 1899–1900, p. 3.

This paper was written while I was Assistant Director of the British School at Athens. A reassessment of the Temple Repositories would not have been possible without the detailed work of Marina Panagiotaki (1999) on the Central Palace Sanctuary at Knossos. I am particularly grateful to Gerald Cadogan for much constructive com-

ment and encouragement, Peter Warren for his critical (and opposing) views, Valasia Isaakidou and Paul Halstead for discussing the paper and particularly details regarding the faunal material, and Lucia Alberti and Kostas Christakis for reading earlier versions of this paper. I thank Michael Vickers of the Evans Archive, Ashmolean Museum, for permission to reproduce the images presented here as Figures 2.1 and 2.2.

2. For recent estimates on the size of

Knossos, see Whitelaw 2001, pp. 28–29, fig. 2:9, 10; 2004, p. 151, fig. 10:3. On Knossos’s exceptionalism, see Day and Wilson 2002; Knappett 2004, p. 264; Hatzaki 2007a.

3. For example, large sections of the West Wing, and the Domestic Quarter; for a discussion of post-Bronze Age activities on the site of the former palace, see Driessen 1990, pp. 32–39, 112; Coldstream 2000; Prent 2004a, pp. 416–418.

in cists or pits. These are virtually time capsules, providing evidence for contextualizing activities both temporally and spatially within the palatial milieu throughout the Middle and Late Bronze Age. My aim is to reinterpret these assemblages based on consideration of the taphonomy and preservation of objects.

THE TEMPLE REPOSITORIES: TAPHONOMIC AND ARTIFACTUAL EVIDENCE

The Temple Repositories, perhaps the most famous deposit in Minoan archaeology,⁴ are two large stone-lined cists on the west side of the Central Court of the palace (Fig. 2.1). They contained a variety of objects (Fig. 2.2), placed in them at the same time and interpreted as the damaged furnishings of a shrine, its precise location unknown but assumed to have been nearby in the West Wing.⁵ The date when these objects were deposited is still a matter of controversy: Middle Minoan (MM) IIIB, or at some time in Late Minoan (LM) IA, following earthquake damage to the presumed shrine either in MM IIIB (Evans's "Great Earthquake")⁶ or sometime in LM IA.⁷ The types of objects and their state of preservation, when combined with depositional details, open a window onto the actions that took place before and during the disposal of this unique assemblage. I shall argue that, rather than being the leavings of accidental damage during a destruction event, followed by ceremonial disposal,⁸ this assemblage constitutes the remains of a carefully planned ritual in which specific objects were chosen for disposal and were in effect removed from circulation. Some were intentionally fragmented, either at the time of disposal or previously, and then were placed carefully in the cists.⁹ While one should not dispute the unique character of the Temple Repositories, a handful of spatially, temporally, and artifactually varied deposits from the West Wing suggests that structured deposition was practiced within this sector of the Palace at Knossos over many centuries.¹⁰

4. Appropriately, the "snake goddess" was the leading figure of the "history of Greek civilization" procession at the Opening Ceremony for the Athens 2004 Olympics. The following account draws upon Panagiotaki's detailed publication of the Temple Repositories (1993; 1999, pp. 71–179, 215–219). I should like to emphasize the importance of Mackenzies' excavation diaries of 1901, published in excerpts in Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 71–74.

5. Evans 1903, p. 62; Driessen and Macdonald 1997, p. 141; Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 130, 148, 150; Warren 2001.

6. *PM I*, p. 289.

7. Driessen and Macdonald 1997, pp. 141–142; Panagiotaki 1998a, with

an extensive discussion on bibliography up to that date; also Panagiotaki 1999, p. 151; but more recently Macdonald 2002, pp. 39–41; 2003; 2004, p. 250; Hatzaki 2007a, 2007b.

8. The assumption that broken artifacts have reached the end of their life cycle, which derives from modern Western concepts, is not necessarily applicable to prehistoric societies—and has been challenged by Chapman (2000). Panagiotaki (1999, p. 150) argues that the carbonized cereals and wood, the soft-baked administrative paraphernalia, and the calcified sea-shells, possible fragments of mudbrick, and pieces of white and red lime wall plaster could be interpreted as evidence

for a fire destruction; Macdonald (2002, pp. 39–41) agrees.

9. Intentional fragmentation has been proposed for the "Snake Goddess" (Alberti 2001; Herva 2005). It is discussed in isolation, however, the various other objects deposited in the cists being largely ignored and the deposit not being treated as a coherent assemblage.

10. The notion of "structured deposit" was originally applied to Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age Wessex (Richards and Thomas 1984) and has been previously applied to Bronze Age Crete by D'Agata (1997–2000).



Figure 2.1. The East and West Repositories, Palace at Knossos, showing associated storage vessels.

Photo courtesy Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Central to my argument are the stratigraphy, the distribution of objects, and their diverse states of preservation. The stratigraphy in the East and West Repositories was virtually identical (Figs. 2.3, 2.4; Table 2.1).¹¹ The 1st (top) level in both cists was roughly 1.20–1.50 m³ of reddish soil, devoid of finds, which was clearly laid in order to seal the contents below, to fill in the cists, and to support a gypsum slab floor. The 2nd (middle) level in both cists consisted of “about 40 more or less perfect [storage] vases,”¹² their interstices filled in with rubble and charred wood, and with gold foil—ideal material to fill in the gaps between the clay vessels. While the 3rd (bottom) level measured approximately 1 m³ in both cists, the contents of each included different types of objects and materials. During excavation these were either removed by hand or collected through careful sieving.¹³ These objects must have been deposited largely free of rubble or other debris, such as pottery sherds and bone, to judge from the sheer quantity of objects and from the descriptions of the soil as “fatter and more compact.”¹⁴

Duncan Mackenzie recorded the sequence in which some objects were recovered from the 3rd (bottom) level in the East Repository: faience fragments, followed by seashells and faience seashells, faience cups, female figurines in faience (including the torso of the so-called Snake Goddess), dresses in faience, and finally arms of figurines and a figurine head. Other finds recovered from the 3rd level of the East Repository, their precise location within the cist not recorded, included administrative paraphernalia (noduli, roundels, and a tablet), faience beads, ivory objects, a marble cross, stone libation tables, two stone hammers, antlers, fish vertebrae, and carbonized cereals. The contents of the West Repository were diametrically different: apart from the lower body of the “Snake Goddess” figurine, they are reported as gold foil, carbonized matter, a rock crystal disk with petals, and bronze (a handle and possibly hinges for boxes).

11. Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 72–73.

12. Panagiotaki 1999, p. 74, n. 36.

13. Panagiotaki 1999, p. 104, n. 239.

14. Panagiotaki 1999, p. 72.



Figure 2.2. A selection of artifacts and ecofacts found in the Temple Repositories, Palace at Knossos, in their arrangement by A. Evans and D. Mackenzie. Photo courtesy Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

All other cists in the West Wing that were filled in the early part of the Neopalatial period were largely devoid of artifacts other than broken pottery.¹⁵ This contrasting picture suggests that all material deposited in the cists was selected for deposition and was not debris swept up from the clearance of a site. The differences in the types of objects deposited in each cist, as well as the stratigraphy, strengthen this interpretation, and imply that their distribution had been carefully planned in advance.

Also revealing is the state of preservation of the different artifacts and ecofacts. Four stone libation tables, and three half-finished bowls or tables, were found intact; of the two hammers, one is intact but has clear wear marks, and the second, now lost, was half-preserved.¹⁶ Bone and ivory objects were fairly intact.¹⁷ Of the administrative paraphernalia, some were intact, others fragmentary.¹⁸ Their preservation presupposes that they had been baked, but their deposition exclusively within the East Repository suggests that after burning, they were selected and deposited as a group. Apart from cypress wood—which, although described as carbonized, could have been simply calcined—the cereals had been burnt (which preserved them).¹⁹ Evans recorded that cereals were “found in some abundance,”²⁰ which implies that they were in concentrations large enough to be visible to the naked eye.

At first, the faunal material could give the impression of being an odd assortment of animal and fish bones.²¹ The three antlers perhaps came from the same species, red or fallow deer, a species not native to Crete and unique among the prehistoric faunal material from Knossos.²² As for the

15. Only the cists north of the Temple Repositories revealed “sizable blocks of obsidian” (*PM* IV, p. 635, n. 2; Panagiotaki 1999, p. 30); see also Knappett 2000; Macdonald 2002, pp. 38, 44, pl. 7:a.

16. Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 122–125, 173–174, pl. 21.

17. Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 172–173, pl. 20.

18. Thirty flat-based nodules, 45 noduli, 12 hanging nodules, six roundels, one to two object sealings, and one Linear A tablet; Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 104–118; *CMS* II.8, pp. 802–810; Krzyszkowska 2005, pp. 164–165.

19. Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 122, 173.

20. Evans 1903, p. 41.

21. Panagiotaki 1999, p. 73.

22. For references to the antlers, see Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 118, 172, pls. 17, 20:a. For observations about the presence of different species at Knossos, see Isaakidou 2004; I am grateful to Valasia Isaakidou and Paul Halstead for informing me that the antlers belong to red or fallow deer.

Figure 2.3. Schematic reconstruction of stratigraphy within the East and West Temple Repositories showing depth of different levels. 1st (*top*) level = “reddish terracotta colour”; 2nd (*middle*) level = “darker with an admixture of rubble and charred wood”; 3rd (*bottom*) level = “fatter and more compact.” E. Hatzaki

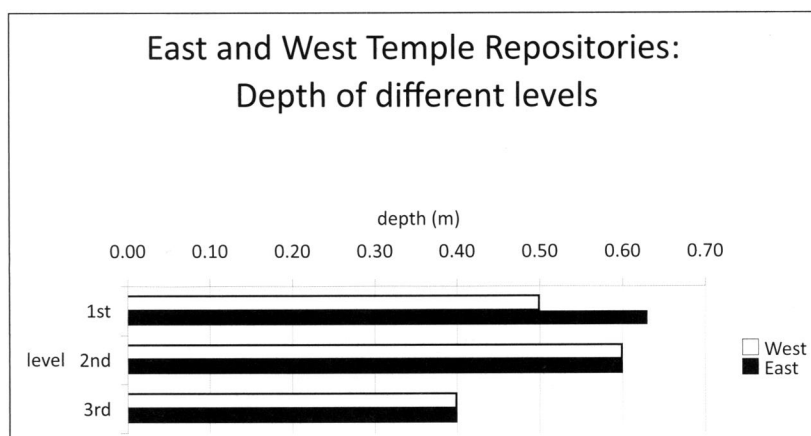
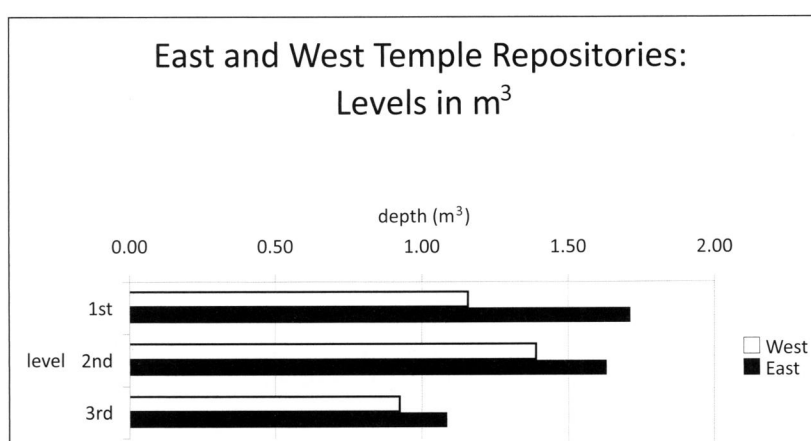


Figure 2.4. Schematic reconstruction of depth of levels within the East and West Temple Repositories. E. Hatzaki



fish, the different sizes of their vertebrae suggest that they are from different species of fish.²³ The largest of the vertebrae has been identified as shark—a rare find in Bronze Age contexts, and an indication of fishing in the open sea.²⁴ The weasel skull cannot be a later intrusion, as the cists are stone lined.²⁵ Although Evans was incorrect to associate the skull with the vertebrae, and to identify the remains as those of a snake,²⁶ it is tempting to retain the association and to consider the remains as those of a “monster,” a symbolic representation of a “snake” intended for display. Finally, the number of marine shells retrieved from the East Repository was, at a minimum, 6,340.²⁷ This is one of the largest concentrations of marine shells from Bronze Age Crete, and by far the largest from Knossos.²⁸

23. For the variation among the vertebrae, see Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 119, 172, pl. 17.

24. The symbolic importance of a successful catch while fishing at open sea is demonstrated by Mylona (2000) in relation to the “Fishermen” frescoes from the West House at Akrotiri, Thera.

25. For the skull, see Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 118–119, 172.

26. Panagiotaki 1999, pl. 17.

27. A few kilos of fragmentary sea-shells reported (Panagiotaki 1999, p. 129) are presumably included in the catalogue (Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 128–131, 175). Otherwise, the total number of marine shells must rise.

28. Reese 1982; 1987; 1995, pp. 240–252; Evelyn 1984; for comparison with the number of marine shells from Kommos, see Reese 1995, pp. 245–246, table 5.24.

TABLE 2.1. DISTRIBUTION OF OBJECTS WITHIN THE TWO CISTS OF THE TEMPLE REPOSITORIES

	<i>East Temple Repository</i>	<i>West Temple Repository</i>
1st (top) level	No finds reported	No finds reported
2nd (middle) level	Storage jars, wood, fragments of gold foil	Storage jars, wood, fragments of gold foil
3rd (bottom) level	Administrative paraphernalia, stone hammers, faience beads, ivory objects, marble cross, stone libation tables, antlers, weasel head, fish vertebrae, carbonized cereals *Faience fragments (including inlays) *Seashells and faience seashells *Faience cups *Figurines (articulated) *Skirts *Arms *Head	Lower body of “Snake Goddess” figurine, gold foil, carbonized matter, rock crystal disk with petals, bronze

*In sequence of discovery (after Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 72–73).

None of the faiences was burnt, and all were found exclusively in the East Repository, apart from the lower body of the “Snake Goddess”: this had been placed, deliberately, in the West Repository.²⁹ The circumstance makes for compelling evidence for both intentional fragmentation and the simultaneous deposition of objects within the two cists. In general the faience objects were found in varied degrees of preservation.³⁰ The faience miniature vessels,³¹ beads, and inlays are generally more intact than the figurines (see Fig. 2.2), perhaps because they are smaller and fairly flat. It is possible that the faience inlays were damaged, and parts of them lost, during breakage or dismantlement of the wooden objects to which they were attached.³² However, on some of them, the edges look quite worn,³³ suggesting that the inlays had been broken on a different occasion and kept. It is also possible that parts of the figurines and miniature vessels were lost in the course of their breakage, which seems to have taken place somewhere away from the cists, or perhaps during excavation and later processing.³⁴

The crystal disk with petals in the West Repository was photographed by Evans together with some gold and bronze objects, which may indicate that those objects are also from that cist.³⁵ Carbonized matter, perhaps from

29. Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 72–73. Panagiotaki does not identify the figurine whose parts were found in the two cists, but it is clear that it is no. 210 (Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 100, 161, fig. 26:210) since it is the only one with snakes around the dress—as Mackenzie mentions in the excavation diaries (Panagiotaki 1999, p. 73, n. 22); see also Fig. 2.2, above, first figurine from left.

30. Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 74–104, 151–163.

31. Apart from the “baskets,” which

are fairly fragmentary (Panagiotaki 1999, p. 94, nos. 199, 200, fig. 23), the other miniature vessels are “fairly” complete (Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 92, 94, 197–198, figs. 22, 23).

32. For the faience objects, see Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 74–104, 151–163. Faience has a higher breakage capacity than pottery or stone. Precise details regarding the recovery procedures of objects found in the cists are not known, but since the administrative paraphernalia are reported to have been collected in the sieve, we may assume

that this was also the case for most of the faience objects. It is possible that the faience objects were further damaged during sieving or that some pieces were subsequently lost.

33. Panagiotaki 1999, pl. 12.

34. It is hard to distinguish between old and new breaks among the figurines because they are so heavily restored.

35. Panagiotaki 1999, pl. 22. Faience objects from the East Repository were also photographed together (Panagiotaki 1999, pl. 11:e).

cloth, wood, and baskets, is also reported from the West Repository,³⁶ and formed the bulk of the deposit.

The contents of the two cists are notorious for their lack of ceramic tableware—either complete or fragmentary—which several Minoan scholars have viewed as a major impediment to fine-tuning the date of use and deposition of this assemblage.³⁷ In contrast to the many Neopalatial deposits of tableware from the palace, where conical cups in particular are found in the hundreds,³⁸ here 40–50 storage vessels were distributed between the two cists; most of them are imports from other parts of the island or the Cyclades.³⁹ Figure 2.2, a photograph taken after excavation, shows 28 complete vessels.⁴⁰ To keep them intact and to fit them into the cists without spilling their contents,⁴¹ these vessels must have been placed upright and very close to each other.⁴² Their state of preservation, when compared to that of the burnt administrative paraphernalia and the broken faience, suggests that the storage vessels came from a different former context than these other objects, and their separate deposition in the 2nd (middle) level of the cists might confirm the suggestion. Although tableware in clay is absent, there are seven miniatures in faience, six open and one closed shape.⁴³

SYNTHESIS

To continue to sustain the hypothesis of a destruction in the palace, by fire or earthquake, to explain the circumstances of the deposition in the Temple Repositories, one would have to concede that the destruction did not affect all the objects deposited in the cists in the same way, even though it is assumed that these objects formed a shrine assemblage before damage. The storage vessels, and presumably their contents, remained entirely unaffected; the faience figurines and wooden boxes (or furniture or panels) were broken but not burnt; the administrative paraphernalia and cereals were burnt. Subsequent to this “destruction,” all the objects must have been collected and separated, by type, for a ceremonial deposition in sequence in

36. Panagiotaki 1999, p. 74.

37. Warren and Hankey 1989, pp. 73–74; Panagiotaki 1998a; 1999, p. 136; Macdonald 2003; 2004, p. 250; Krzyszkowska 2005, pp. 164–165; Hatzaki 2007a; 2007b.

38. Popham 1977, pp. 190–195; Macdonald 1996; 2002; Driessen and Macdonald 1997, pp. 139–148.

39. In Panagiotaki 1999, the oval-mouthed amphora (p. 141, fig. 36:331) is certainly an import; the tall jars (p. 143, fig. 37) and the bird vases (pp. 133–136, 144, fig. 38, pl. 26) are Cycladic.

40. Panagiotaki 1999, pls. 24, 25.

41. The description of the texture of the soil as “fatter” in the 3rd (bottom) level of both cists has been interpreted

as evidence that the storage vessels in the 2nd (middle) level contained liquids (Panagiotaki 1999, p. 148).

42. The maximum diameter of the storage vessels ranges between 24.8 and 35.2 cm (following Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 131–136, 175–179). With an average diameter of 30 cm, about 25 vases would have fit into the East Repository, and about 20 into the West Repository—which agrees with the number of 40–50 vessels reported.

43. Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 91–93. Apart from the jug with spiral decoration, six miniature drinking vessels were found in sets of two (Panagiotaki 1999, p. 92, fig. 22). Of these, the two miniature bowls, save for the attached

figure-of-eight shields and shell inlays, resemble in form the short version of a ledge-rimmed cup, a shape very common in early Neopalatial ceramic contexts (Panagiotaki 1999, p. 95, fig. 23:197, 198; compare Popham 1984, pl. 144:1, 2, 14). The two fragmentary bowls with basket handles are, in shape, like a monochrome handleless bowl with slightly inverted rim (Panagiotaki 1999, p. 94, fig. 23:199, 200; compare Popham 1984, pl. 144:17–20) and also some large vessels, suitable for serving, known from roughly contemporary metal originals (*PM* II, p. 631, fig. 395). Apart from the two baskets, all of these miniature vessels are “fairly” complete.

the cists, which in advance had been cleared of all other matter. Although such a scenario cannot be excluded, the taphonomic details and diverse states of preservation of the objects in the East and West Repositories provide compelling evidence for a series of symbolically charged actions involving the removal of certain objects and subsistence provisions from circulation by deliberately breaking or burning and collectively disposing of them within the cists.

The following tentative sequence of events may be reconstructed (see Table 2.1). Some of the sealed documents were opened and read before all the administrative paraphernalia were intentionally destroyed through fire. Then, their remains were collected for deposition as a group. It is tempting to link with this, or a comparable episode, the carbonized cereals, which are the only other burnt matter. The antlers, the weasel's head, and the fish vertebrae were retained for deposition. Some figurines may have been deliberately smashed. The faience-inlaid wooden boxes (or furniture or panels) were also smashed, or dismantled, for deposition. Some of the faiences, especially those with worn edges, may have been in fragments already.⁴⁴ The two stone hammers,⁴⁵ exhibiting clear traces of wear, parallel the pairings of two tall cups, two bowls, and two baskets in faience, and perhaps the six roundels. We should note that in Minoan iconography, hammers are associated exclusively with robed figures.⁴⁶ Regardless of whether such figures have to be identified invariably as priests or priestesses, their exceptional role is always emphasized;⁴⁷ the robed figure leading the procession on the so-called Harvesters' Vase is the most visually striking.⁴⁸

If we reverse the order in which Mackenzie recorded the excavation of the East Repository (Table 2.1), the head of the "Snake Goddess"⁴⁹ (Fig. 2.2, left) was perhaps the first object to be thrown to the bottom of the East Repository, followed by arms and robes, and the other "fairly" complete figurines, including the snake goddess's torso, were deposited afterward—and her lower body kept out for deposition in the West Repository. Next came the tall faience cups. These could suggest some form of feasting—of a very exclusive type, to judge from the luxury material of the cups and the absence of any drinking vessels in clay.

The over 6,000 marine shells deposited immediately afterward might indicate the presence, if not actually, at least symbolically, of a huge number of participants. The collection of such a large number of marine shells

44. If so, they were perhaps brought back for deposition after they had been utilized as fragmentary objects for the enhancement of social relations (Chapman 2000, pp. 49–104); Talalay (1987) also argues for the use of broken Neolithic figurines.

45. Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 122–123, 173, fig. 29:298, pl. 21:b; Platon-Mandi 1981, p. 75, fig. 1. At Knossos, hammers are found exclusively in elite contexts, such as the Little Palace

(Hatzaki 2005, p. 188, fig. 2), unfortunately without secure context within the building; and at Isopata, from the (appropriately named) Tomb of the Mace-Bearer (Tomb 3; Evans 1914, pp. 14–18, fig. 25), dating to LM II. Unlike the hammers from the Temple Repositories, the three found in the "Treasury of the Shrine" in the palace at Zakros do not seem to have any wear marks (Platon-Mandi 1981, p. 77, fig. 3); all the objects recovered from

this room were essentially complete, and the stone vases intact (Platon 1971, pp. 132–149).

46. *CMS* II.3, no. 147, seal from Malia. Robed figures are also depicted holding axes (Marinatos 1993, p. 128, fig. 88:b, c).

47. Marinatos 1993, pp. 127–140.

48. Marinatos and Hirmer 1960, pls. 103–105.

49. Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 100, 161, fig. 26:210.

was not a random or accidental event: it took time to decorate some 480 of them (7.59 percent of the total assemblage) with red, green, and black paint, perhaps to signify age, gender, or rank differentiations. If the overall population of Knossos for the Neopalatial period was between 14,000 and 18,000 individuals,⁵⁰ 6,340 marine shells would suggest that 35–45 percent of the population actually or symbolically participated, and of these only 2.6–3.4 percent were differentiated by colored marine shells.

The elaborately decorated boxes (or furniture or panels), some perhaps covered with gold foil, may have been smashed or dismantled for deposition. They may have originally contained the many faience beads that were recovered,⁵¹ or even the figurines. Of the remaining objects, the lower body of the faience figurine deposited in the West Repository is a symbolic link between the otherwise separated contents of the two cists, perhaps creating a single assemblage and “ownership.”

The taphonomic details imply that the objects deposited in the bottom level of the cists did not form a random collection of objects but instead, prior to their disposal, formed an assemblage that was stored, used, and displayed in the heart of the palace. The related ceremonies can be interpreted as a conspicuous demonstration of power, emphasizing the palace’s ability to “kill” (by removing from circulation), intentionally, a unique assemblage of luxurious objects together with a certain amount of agricultural produce (cereals and contents of storage vessels). Finally, the careful placing of the objects suggests a laborious task, particularly the placing of the intact, and full, storage jars.

If the surrounding walls of room 34 of the Temple Repositories were standing at the time of this disposal, the burning, breaking, and placing of the objects would have been visible to only a very few individuals.⁵² The fact that there are so few faience miniature vessels and stone libation tables may be relevant to this number. The 6,340 marine shells, however, imply a large number of participants, who either set the shells down themselves or were represented by the proposed few. If we follow Geraldine Gesell’s estimate for the space occupied by an individual standing in a crowd,⁵³ and J. W. Shaw and Arron Lowe’s proposed dimensions of the Central Court of the Palace at Knossos,⁵⁴ the court could have held 6,206 people, a number remarkably close to the number of 6,340 marine shells. The choice of the East Repository, where activity would be more easily seen, for the deposition of the bulk of the “visually” impressive artifacts may suggest that the east wall of room 34 had been dismantled by the time of the deposition.

50. Whitelaw 2004, p. 153; but see also Warren 2004, pp. 164–166.

51. Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 159–160, pl. 16:c.

52. In its current layout (Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 259–260, plan 1), 43.28% (7.7904 m²) of the floor capacity of room 34 is taken up by the two cists. The remaining 56.72% (10.2096 m²)

would hardly have sufficed for more than ten individuals, standing, estimating a generous 1 m² per standing person. If, during the period when the cists were filled in, rooms 33 (16.47 m²) and 34 formed a single unit, the total floor space excluding the cists would have risen to 26.6796 m², i.e., 77.40% of the total area of the two rooms,

and would have held about 26 individuals.

53. Standing in a crowd: 0.23225 m² (2.5 ft²) per person (Gesell 1987, p. 123, n. 1).

54. Length 52.8 m, maximum width 27.3 m (Shaw and Lowe 2002, p. 522, n. 19).

Alongside this interpretation of the Temple Repositories as a structured deposit, they can also be viewed as a foundation deposit, a practice common in Minoan Crete but not confined to palatial or elite contexts.⁵⁵ Usually such deposits, several of which are known from the town of Knossos,⁵⁶ are associated with a handful of ceramic vessels, typically conical cups and pouring vessels, set either below, or near the base of, a wall. If the Temple Repositories are a foundation deposit, the scale and exceptionalism of the assemblage is in accordance with the monumentality of the building, its subsistence supremacy,⁵⁷ and its ideological domination. It is tempting to connect this unique episode with a major phase in the history of the palace, perhaps as an aftermath to the seismic events of either MM IIIB or LM IA. The elaborate ritual performed could have been linked to the inauguration, or the completion, of building work, thus marking the beginning or the end of a cycle in the building's long use. The deposition of religious, administrative (and possibly workshop)⁵⁸ paraphernalia, and agricultural commodities, plus the actual or symbolic participation of both "few" and "many," suggests that the ultimate aim was to sustain the social, political, economic, and religious relations of the palace.

Although the Temple Repositories are undoubtedly a unique assemblage, the absence of any parallels from Neopalatial Crete outside of Knossos should perhaps not come as a surprise, to judge from Knossos's tendency—especially within the boundaries of the palace—toward exceptionalism. Within the Knossian milieu, however, the assemblage might not be the sole candidate for evidence of activities involving intentional fragmentation and structured deposition. The Vat Room deposit,⁵⁹ dating to the eve of the Old Palace period, and the contents of a pit in room 46a behind the Throne Room,⁶⁰ dating to the beginning of the Final Palatial period, attest the performance of highly charged ritual actions to mark major changes in the building's long life. The idea of intentional fragmentation of luxury objects of unique craftsmanship is not unknown in Minoan studies,⁶¹ but has not as yet been systematically explored.

55. Gesell has suggested that the assemblage was ritually buried (1983, p. 95; 1985, pp. 86–88). For the practice in Minoan Crete, see, for example, Boulotis 1982; 1985; MacGillivray, Sackett, and Driessen 1999; and Herva 2005, pp. 216–217. Herva (2005) proposes to name such deposits "building deposits" instead of "foundation deposits," and provides a summary list of such deposits limited to palatial examples. The term "foundation deposit," although perhaps inadequate for certain contexts, is well embedded in the literature, and is more appropriate than "building deposit," as it immediately references deposits buried below floors. The expression "building deposits" can easily be confused with assemblages accumulated

within buildings and above floors.

56. All vessels from the Knossian contexts are miniatures; Catling, Catling, and Smyth 1979, p. 19, fig. 14, pls. 2:h, 14:g; Popham 1984, pls. 14 (foundation deposit, section), 137:d.

57. Christakis 2003, 2004.

58. Possible workshop paraphernalia: the unfinished stone objects (Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 123, 173–174, pl. 21:f).

59. This assemblage, laid in a plaster-lined pit, included 1,639 spherical beads and the arm of a faience figurine; workshop debris, including exotic raw materials brought from overseas (e.g., Anatolian obsidian, gold, ivory, and an ostrich egg); stone vases, plaques, shells, bronze, faience, and frit objects; and administrative paraphernalia. Sets of

intact tableware and storage vessels suggest that a small number of individuals were involved in a feasting event related to the deposition of the assemblage (Panagiotaki 1998b; 1999, pp. 8–43).

60. Over 100 exceptionally long obsidian blades, of which only about five to ten had been used, and associated debitage were buried in a pit soon after manufacture. The highly "theatrical" and rare knapping performance that can be reconstructed on the basis of the contents of the pit must have taken place somewhere in the immediate vicinity of the Throne Room (Carter 2004).

61. Rehak 1995; MacGillivray, Driessen, and Sackett 2000.

CONCLUSIONS

Minoan archaeology is still trapped in the “destruction and site clearance syndrome,” where deposits are all too quickly interpreted as primary, and the result of fire destruction (whether caused by humans or accidental), or secondary, and the outcome of subsequent site clearances. While there is good evidence for such incidents, a closer look at the taphonomic processes, types of objects, and state of preservation of select assemblages suggests entirely different interpretations. Different readings of material culture affect our understanding of exclusive and inclusive human activity.

In the absence of contemporary parallels, the assemblage of the Temple Repositories, unique in terms of artifacts and ecofacts, is difficult to contextualize within Neopalatial Crete. In a Knossian palatial context, however, structured deposition presents close parallels over a long time, and the unique deposits buried under the floors of the West Wing of the palace provide a glimpse into the elaborate rituals performed by elite social groups inside the palace. The intentional fragmentation of figurines in the form of the human body may perhaps be a metaphor for human sacrifice, osteological evidence for which has been found at Knossos and Anemospelia.⁶² The Temple Repositories demonstrated the Palace’s ability to “kill” and to remove from circulation an assemblage loaded with symbolic significance, and they also provided the opportunity to make a declaration of social supremacy. In addition, the 6,340 marine shells may provide surprising ecofactual testimony for the use of the palace’s Central Court for ritual activities involving a large number of individuals, in this case participating in the deposition of objects in the cists. The palatial authority thus actively and explicitly pursued the reproduction of social structure.

The Temple Repositories make clear that, in the Neopalatial period, exceptional events took place within the palace confines, in terms of an explicit reference to, and a maintenance of, a strictly defined hierarchy that separated the “few” from the “many.” Artifactual evidence for such a dichotomy is demonstrated in the numerous—and quite different—Neopalatial deposits of carelessly manufactured conical cups, usually associated with a small number of finer decorated wares, in several sectors of the palace.⁶³ Apart from being considered an obstacle to closely dating such deposits, the lack of fine decorated wares from palatial contexts marks a significant contrast with the quantities of fine decorated wares in contemporary assemblages in

62. Warren 1981; Wall, Musgrave, and Warren 1986; Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997, pp. 268–311. It may not be accidental that among the figurines from the Temple Repositories, all, apart from the “Snake Goddess,” lack the head or upper torso (Panagiotaki 1999, pp. 161–163).

63. Their “crude” execution is related to the sheer quantity of production for

palatial and nonpalatial consumption alike; for large quantities of conical cups from a domestic, nonpalatial context, see Catling, Catling, and Smyth 1979, pp. 24, 33, figs. 17, 21. For the deposits, see Macdonald 1996, 2002; Driessen and Macdonald 1997. A typical example is the East–West Stairs deposit (Popham 1977, pp. 194–195, pls. 30, 31), where two cup rhyta decorated

with reeds (Popham 1977, p. 187, fig. 1:e, f) and an S-profile cup with spiral decoration (Popham 1977, pl. 30:e, f) are among the few complete vessels in dark-on-light lustrous ware. Dark-on-light ware is represented in small numbers, whereas plain ware (Popham 1977, pls. 30, 31) constitutes the bulk of this assemblage, which has still to be quantified according to ware.

the town.⁶⁴ This antithesis implies that the same output in terms of ceramic production was differently utilized in different contexts.

Probably, different social dynamics were at play in the palatial and urban contexts of Neopalatial Knossos. Potentially informative are the iconographical representations from the palace, such as the Sacred Grove and Dance fresco and the Miniature Temple fresco.⁶⁵ In both, a mass of participants observes actions performed by small groups of performers, in an urban setting identified with the West Court, and with the Central Court and the West Wing, of the Palace at Knossos. Thus artifactual and visual evidence from the Palace at Knossos combine in demonstrating that events involving a “few” active participant-performers and “many” passive participant-observers are a recurrent theme in the palace environment. Perhaps events such as the structured depositions in the Old Palace Vat Room deposit, the Neopalatial Temple Repositories, and the Final Palatial pit in room 46a behind the Throne Room, despite their varied temporal and artifactual contexts, have more in common than has been envisaged.

Recent attempts toward a “redefinition” of the Minoan palaces and the proposed introduction of new terminology (“court compounds”) have emphasized the communal aspect of these buildings, as the main political arena for social groups to interact by participating in ritual performances and communal feasts,⁶⁶ while—unconvincingly—downplaying “traditional” aspects of the palaces, such as their diachronically overwhelming supremacy in subsistence surplus. The artifactual and iconographical evidence from the Palace at Knossos demonstrates that the events and performances taking place within the confines of the palace, and possibly in its immediate environment such as the West Court and Theatral Area, could have served several purposes. While perhaps reducing social tensions among the “many,” at the same time they reinforced the leading role of the “few,” who would have been closely linked to the ideological and economic supremacy of the Palace. The social dynamics that were negotiated, established, and maintained within the palatial environment may have been quite different from those followed in the temporally and spatially varied urban, funerary, and rural sectors of Bronze Age Knossos.

64. For example, Popham 1984, pls. 141–145; Warren 1991; 1999; Hatzaki 2007a, 2007b.

65. Sacred Grove and Dance fresco, *PM* III, pl. 18; Miniature Temple fresco, Evelyn 1999, p. 195.

66. Driessen 2002, p. 12.